

Education, Children and Young People Committee  
Wednesday 18 March 2026  
11th Meeting, 2026 (Session 6)

## Community sporting initiatives for children and young people

### Introduction

1. At its meeting on 21 January 2026, the Committee agreed to hold a one-off session on community sporting initiatives for children and young people, with a particular focus on football.

### Committee meeting

2. At its meeting today, the Committee will take evidence from the following witnesses—
  - Mark Williams, Chief Operating Officer, Denis Law Legacy Trust
  - Debbi McCulloch, Chief Executive Officer, Spartans Community Foundation

### Supporting information

3. A SPICe briefing has been prepared for this meeting. This is included at **Annexe A**.

**Committee Clerks, March 2026**

## Annexe A



Education, Children and Young People Committee  
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# Community Sporting Initiatives for Children and Young People

## Introduction

The Committee has agreed to take evidence from football organisations to discuss their community-based work and the support this provides for children and young people.

The Committee will take evidence from:

- Denis Law Legacy Trust
- Spartans Community Foundation

## Policy context

### Physical activity and sport

The [Local Government and Planning \(Scotland\) Act 1982](#) includes a duty on local authorities to ensure adequate provision of facilities for recreational and sporting activities. Local authorities (or their Arm's-Length External Organisations) are key players in supporting physical activity.

The Scottish Government published [Physical activity for health: framework](#) in 2024. This builds on a [2018 Active Scotland Delivery Plan](#) and sets out a vision:

More People, More Active, More Often

The First Minister's foreword to the framework said:

“Recognising the many benefits of an active nation, the Scottish Government has always been committed to supporting and enabling people to be more active. ... Every part of the Scottish Government has some role to play and both I and my Ministers are committed to working collectively across portfolios at a national level to deliver our vision.

The 2024 framework has eight outcome areas and is intended to be a “whole system approach to physical activity”. These include:

- Active Places of Learning  
i.e. to develop active environments, policies and opportunities across all places of learning.
- Active Places and Spaces  
i.e. to improve access and sustainability of good quality public and green spaces, green networks, recreational spaces (including on water), play and sports amenities. Also to ensure that physical activity is considered during planning processes.
- Active Sport and Recreation  
i.e. to ensure that sport and active recreation opportunities target people and communities where the need is greatest, and the participation rates are lower while also supporting those who are already active to remain so.

Sport Scotland's strategy [Sport For Life](#) was first published in 2019. This sees people taking part in physical education and sport in three areas:

- Schools and education
- Clubs and communities
- Performance Sport

The identified outcomes of Sport for Life include measures of participants and the diversity of participants. In [its 2025 Annual review](#), Sport Scotland found that 1.1 million people take part in its programmes, of which:

- 67% are male and 33% are female
- 50% are adults and 50% are junior or youth

The review also found that participation in the Active Schools is increasing and 40% of pupils take part in Active Schools.

The Active Schools programme aims to:

- create more and higher quality opportunities to participate in sports before school, during lunchtime and after school
- develop effective pathways between schools and clubs in the local community.

Active Schools is part funded by Scottish Government through Sport Scotland. [An evaluation was published in January 2026](#). This found that more than a quarter of Active Schools sessions were football, with other common activities including multi-sports, netball, dance, basketball and rugby. The evaluation also found:

“Active Schools is getting young people more active. 280,000 young people were involved in 2024/25, and almost half of Active Schools participants say they would be less active without Active Schools. The health and wider benefits of being active are well researched and evidenced. However, Active Schools is not reaching everyone to the same extent – with under-

representation and differing outcomes for girls and young women and young people with additional support needs (ASN). These groups are known to be less likely to be active.”

In terms of links between Active Schools sessions and local clubs, the report noted:

“Overall, in 2024/25, 9% of Active Schools sessions were delivered by clubs. This compares with 10% the two previous years, and 11% in 2021/22. More than 1,000 schools had at least one school to club link. ... In 2024/25, two thirds of school to club links related to football or rugby, and ten per cent related to multi-sports. ... There were more school to club links for the activities most frequented by boys and young men, than girls and young women.”

Sports clubs are typically voluntary organisations supported by the relevant sports governing body and local authority within which they operate. There are around 13,000 sports clubs across Scotland, which tend to rely on membership fees to support their operation, however some receive investment from successful National Lottery and local authority grant bids.

Professional sports clubs, such as the 42 that compete in the Scottish Professional Football League (SPFL), can be [involved in community work](#). The SPFL Trust is responsible for coordinating this work, including the [Football Fans in Training](#) programme which receives financial backing from the Scottish Government.

## Scottish Attainment Challenge

The Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) is the Scottish Government’s policy framework to use education to improve outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty, with a focus on tackling the poverty-related attainment gap. SAC is backed by the Attainment Scotland Fund: around £200m per year. There are a number of funds under the ASF, the Pupil Equity Fund (PEF) is distributed to schools and individual headteachers are able to determine how this money is spent. The Strategic Equity Fund is provided to local authorities.

The Committee undertook an inquiry into the refreshed approach to SAC in 2022. [One of its recommendations was:](#)

“The Committee notes that the poverty-related attainment gap cannot be tackled by schools alone. There is a need for strong collaboration with stakeholders, including third sector organisations which can often facilitate the vital link between school and home. The Committee is aware that the short-term nature of funding is a long-standing problem for many third sector organisations. The Committee invites local authorities to consider how multi-year funding can be offered to third sector organisations within the parameters of the Framework. The Committee recommends that Education Scotland monitors how local authorities are, where appropriate, ensuring stability of funding for third sector partners and evaluating how such longer-term relationships impact on outcomes for children, young people and their families.”

The [Scottish Government's National Improvement Framework 2026](#) noted that:

“Delivering improvement and closing the poverty-related attainment gap is something that schools and ELC settings cannot address on their own. There needs to be a more holistic approach to take account of the wider relationship between home and schools.”

The Government has an ongoing evaluation of SAC and in [2025 it published an interim evaluation](#). Under the theme topic of approaches to support engagement and support for families and communities, the evaluation found that:

“Learning suggests that impactful approaches involve [among other things] Effective links, collaboration and joint working with wider public and third sector partners.”

## Health, Social Care and Sport Committee

The Health, Social Care and Sport Committee (HSCSC) has undertaken a number of pieces of work looking at the participation of sport this session. Some areas of work and relevant recommendations are set out below.

### Health and Wellbeing of Children and Young People (2022)

HSCSC undertook a wide-ranging inquiry in 2021-22 on the [Health and Wellbeing of Children and Young People](#). It published its report in [May 2022](#).

Under the section on the role of schools and youth services in supporting health and wellbeing, that HSCSC noted the “central and pivotal role schools have to play in coordinating a whole systems approach to supporting the health and wellbeing of children and young people” and recommended that:

“The Scottish Government to do all it can to facilitate multi agency cooperation and to break down barriers to whole systems approaches to supporting the health and wellbeing of children and young people.” (para 66)

### Female participation in sport and physical activity

In 2022-23, HSCSC undertook an inquiry into Female participation in sport and physical activity. It [published its report in October 2023](#). HSCSC expressed concern “that many girls and women are given limited opportunities to participate in sports and physical activities that are stereotypically viewed as being male-dominated and therefore unlikely to be of interest to them or suitable for female participation.” (para 6)

HSCSC also suggested that there should be more of a focus on participation in sport and physical activity for fun as well as for competition.

### Other sessions

HSCSC has held several one-off sessions on sport since 2021. The latest was on [3 March 2026](#). In this session Forbes Dunlop from Sport Scotland highlighted work it had undertaken to map community assets and suggested that there was variability

across different local authorities in how schools make their facilities available to their community.

## **SPICe briefings on physical activity and sport**

This session, SPICe has published several briefings on policy around physical activity (PA) and sport.

- [Sport in Scotland: An Overview of Legislation, Governance, Policy and Funding](#) (May 2024)

SPICe published two briefings from academics who participated in the SPICe academic fellowship scheme.

- [Getting the inactive active: Barriers to physical activity and their potential policy solutions](#) (January 2025)
- [Getting the inactive active: Barriers to physical activity and their potential policy solutions](#) (September 2025)

The January 2025 paper noted:

“There are significant concerns when analysing the current participation rates of young people. For example, only a small minority of children and young people are currently meeting daily PA recommendations. There is a growing disparity between children and young people who are physically active and those who are not. This has been exacerbated by many activities not returning to pre-COVID-19 patterns. Fewer than one in five (17%) of adolescents in Scotland meet the current physical activity recommendations for 60 minutes a day of moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA).”

The [September 2025 paper concluded](#) that:

“Education is considered a key space for engaging young people in PA and sport. It is vital however, to be cognisant of the fact that negative experiences of physical education, PA or sport at school can have a significant impact on people's perceptions of them as they move through the life course. Evidence presented within this report has shown the importance of early intervention alongside the challenges that are faced in primary schools in relation to teacher confidence and experience in delivering physical education and PA. Whilst the majority of school are nominally meeting the requirement for 2 hours of physical education per week there is no way of determining the quality of those two hours. Alongside this concern is the anecdotal evidence presented in this report of the impact of this on young people as they transition into secondary schools with reduced movement competencies.”

The September 2025 paper suggested that the Curriculum Improvement Cycle was an “opportunity to explore ways in which PA could be incorporated more extensively into the curriculum”. It also highlighted the issue of communities’ access to the school estate.

## Denis Law Legacy Trust

The Denis Law Legacy Trust (“the Trust”) is a charity working in Aberdeen with a “focus on delivering and facilitating a wide range of ‘free to access’ sports and creative activities for young people within their own communities 50 weeks of the year.”

The Trust has a youth forum, [Granite City Speaks](#), which informs the Trust’s governance.

### Streetsport

[Streetsport](#) is the Trust’s “flagship programme” and is delivered in partnership with Robert Gordon University (RGU). This programme delivers free week-nightly sport and creative activity sessions to young people, 5-nights a week, 50 weeks of the year. These [sessions take place across the City of Aberdeen and Bridge of Don](#).

Streetsport was initially piloted in 2006 in a partnership between RGU Sport, Gray’s School of Art and Police Scotland. The programme was focused on areas that experienced high levels of anti-social behaviour.

An [evaluation by Gray’s School of Art](#) said that Streetsport helped to “eliminate barriers with ‘hard to reach youths’ and helped foster ‘social value’ and belonging within communities”. The Trust says:

“Streetsport has successfully reduced instances of anti-social behaviour; improved health and wellbeing; and encouraged inclusivity through sport, physical activity, and creative endeavour.”

### Denis Law’s Academy

[Denis Law’s Academy](#) is a programme supported by RGU and the Wood Trust. This programme “aims to support young people through personal, professional and wellbeing development to help shape their aspirations.” This programme is aimed at young people aged 14-20 and can support young people into training and work, as well as supporting the young people to make decisions about their life and aspirations.

Young people are recruited to Denis Law’s Academy through the Streetsport programme.

### Club10

The Trust says that “Club 10 aims to strengthen relationships between inmates at HMP & YOI Grampian and their families, through sport and creative activities.”

### Cruyff Courts

[The Trust has developed three ‘Cruyff Courts’ in Aberdeen](#) in partnership with Aberdeen City Council and the Cruyff Foundation. These are hi-tech, all-weather playing areas.

## Spartans Community Foundation

[Spartans Community Foundation](#) (“the Foundation”) is a charity and social enterprise in North Edinburgh.

### Youth Work

[The Foundation provides](#) “a packed weekly schedule of youth work clubs that are all free of charge”. The Foundation says:

“Our activities include weekly youth clubs, day trips, residentials and holiday clubs. We like to eat together, and our clubs include a meal, often prepared by young people. All of our youth work activities are free of charge.”

### Education

[The Foundation states](#) that “educational attainment is a challenge in North Edinburgh where outcomes for local young people consistently fall below national levels.” The Foundation highlights a number of ways that it supports learning in its community.

#### Alternative School

The Foundation’s alternative school is aimed at secondary school students and “provides young people who are at risk of exclusion from mainstream education or who may find school a challenge”. The Foundation states:

“There is a focus on self-reflection, personal development and intensive support. Students attend two or three times a week where they take part in 1:1 or small group learning in numeracy, literacy, music, art, physical education, entrepreneurial learning, work experience and volunteering.”

#### Transition Support

The Foundation’s youth work team provides support to care-experienced pupils as they transition from primary to secondary school. The Foundation states:

“Our team supports each pupil to negotiate this journey – this could be in how to travel to secondary school, where and how to find help at their new school or simply chatting through things that they may be nervous or unsure about.”

#### Youth Work in Primary Schools

The Foundation’s youth work team also work directly in primary schools. The Foundation says:

“Working in close partnership with schools, the youth work team provides individuals and small groups of pupils with social, emotional and attainment support.”

#### Education Officers

The Foundation also has education officers working in local primary schools providing 1:1 pupil support. These officers also deliver three programmes focusing

on: mental health; STEM; and environment, sustainability, social enterprise & physical activity.

## Health and Wellbeing

The Foundation also provides a variety of free to access or low-cost community health and wellbeing activities.

## SFA and the Extra Time project

The SFA has a number of strategic documents:

- [The Power of Football](#), an overall Strategic Plan covering 2021-2025;
- a Grassroots Strategy [Football For All](#) 2022-2025; and
- [Accelerate Our Game](#) 2021–2025, a strategy for Women’s and Girls’ Football.

The ‘Vision’ and ‘Mission’ in The Power of Football are:

Vision: Harness the power of football to inspire the nation, transform lives and build a united and successful game.

Mission: Protect, develop and promote football for all, so current and future generations can enjoy and love our national game

There are a number of ‘Gamechangers’ or ‘strategic pillars’ underneath these aims. There are three which relate to participation:

- Accelerate the growth of girls’ and women’s football
- Inspire the nation through lifelong participation
- Connect Scottish football’s diverse communities

Football for All also has a ‘Vision’ and a ‘Mission’. These are:

Vision: Harness the power of football to improve the wellbeing of Scotland's communities through lifelong participation.

Mission: Lead on the collective action to remove participation barriers by influencing policy, increasing investment and improving systems so football can be accessed and enjoyed by all.

This grassroots strategy has a focus on participation in organised or club-based football, although it also contains actions on wider community assets that would support more informal involvement in the sport.

Accelerate Our Game again sets out a 'Vision' and 'Mission' for the women's game. These are:

Vision: Harness the power of women's football by changing perceptions and empowering people to inspire the nation, transform lives and build an inclusive, respected and successful game.

Mission: Protect, develop and promote women's football for all, by investing in the people, product and pathways, so current and future generations can enjoy and love our national game equally.

## Extra Time

The SFA delivers the Extra Time initiative which provides free after school and holiday clubs for families on low incomes. [The Scottish Government announced in June 2025](#) that it was increasing the annual funding of this programme this year to £5.5m, up from £4m in 2024-25. A Government media release in January 2026 said—

“The Scottish Government’s 2026-27 Budget will continue to invest £5.5 million to provide up to 5,000 children with access to services through the Extra Time programme, working with 51 football clubs and trusts across 28 local authority areas.”

[The Extra Time programme](#) aims to provide after school and holiday activity clubs for primary school aged children from low-income backgrounds. The [SFA's Extra Time Good Practice Guide](#) said:

“Extra Time clubs should have a particular focus on the [6 priority family types<sup>1</sup> as identified in the Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan](#). However, we recognise that football clubs, as well as schools who refer families to their local Extra Time clubs, know their communities and may wish to support a wider cohort of families, including care/trauma experienced families.”

The Good Practice Guide said that “clubs should implement a referral process that suits them, their community and their partner schools”.

The Good Practice Guide has Minimum Delivery Criteria. For term time provision these include that the programme runs immediately before or after the school day, for at least 2 hours and on at least 3 days. There are also minimum requirements for provision during the holiday as well as a direction to “complement other locally run activity services (e.g. running separate weeks during a longer holiday period) to ensure choice for families”. Food must be provided in the programme.

The Good Practice Guide says that Extra Time Programmes can be delivered on the school premises and that “strong relationships with partner schools and Headteachers are crucial to delivery and can positively impact delivery by supporting

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<sup>1</sup> The six priority family types identified as being at highest risk of child poverty are: lone parent families, minority ethnic families, families with a disabled adult or child, families with a younger mother (under 25), families with a child under 1, and larger families (3+ children).

the participant referral process, and strengthening relationships with children and their families.”

An [evaluation of the programme was published in June 2025](#). This found that there was evidence of impact of the programme across several outcomes:

- Tackling poverty by providing free access to organised activity before and after the school day, and during the holidays, with a perceived impact on parents/carers gaining and maintaining employment.
- Tackling food insecurities by providing free food and snacks which resulted in a perceived more equal access to food while at the service. Clubs actively worked with families to reduce stigma around asking for support in relation to food provision.
- Improving children’s health and wellbeing by reportedly increasing their confidence and social skills, while providing a supportive and a safe environment.
- Improving school attendance and attainment with anecdotal evidence of improved school attendance from children who attend Extra Time.

The evaluation concluded that:

“Although football is a key part of Extra Time, clubs also delivered a variety of activities and sports (e.g. rounders, basketball, arts and craft etc.). Clubs have designed their Extra Time sessions to be inclusive of children from different backgrounds and ages, whilst emphasising that sessions are fun, social and non-competitive.”

The evaluation found that a number of factors were key to the success of Extra Time schemes. These included skilled and well-trained staff, safe and inclusive environments, and children and families’ voice in developing the service. It said “strong collaborations and relationships with schools appear to be essential to facilitate the successful delivery of Extra Time”.

Some of the challenges the evaluation identified were: staff numbers; the behaviour of participants; and uncertainty around funding. It also stated:

“One of the primary unexpected challenges reported by clubs was the high interest and demand for the Extra Time programme, providing evidence to support why the programme is needed whilst also reinforcing the challenge to meet demand.”

**Ned Sharratt, Researcher (Education and Culture), SPICe**

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